



## **Corrections and Reentry Issues Ripe for Collaborative Approaches**

Counties are facing an abundance of corrections-related issues and uncertainty at the moment. Plans to reduce the state prison population over time will likely impact counties, with any state-level prisoner releases shifting costs and responsibilities for housing and services to individual counties.

Overcrowding issues are affecting county, as well as state, facilities. According to the November 19 issue of Capitol Weekly, at least 20 counties have “court-ordered inmate-population limits and dwindling dollars are curbing the ability of the counties to house some 76,000 inmates.”

AB 900, passed in 2007, offers infrastructure investment in state and local correctional facilities, but the measure conditions receipt of jail construction awards to a county’s willingness to site a state reentry facility, and this hasn’t always proved politically viable.

There are, however, nearly a dozen reentry programs up and running around the state. The reasons? 137,000 individuals are released from California state prisons annually and are expected to reintegrate into society and refrain from committing further crimes. With limited services, support and other resources, 70 percent of parolees commit a new offense within three years of their release.

These issues of local corrections policy, jail construction and approaches to reentry are not without controversy. Residents often hold strong opinions and partisan views, and polarization and gridlock on county policies or actions are distinct possibilities.

Local public information and engagement strategies, as well as effective collaborations among sectors and stakeholders, can make the difference between stewing in controversy or moving forward. A few basic rules:

- Start early and get a process out in front of the issue or controversy if possible.
- Be realistic about the time and resources required to make collaborative approaches successful.
- Work as collaboratively with stakeholders on developing the approach to engagement as you do on the engagement process itself.
- Don’t leave out the very people or groups you need in order to find an effective and lasting solution.
- Look around and learn from the experiences of other local agencies.
- Consider the differences in implementation and outcomes between approaches that: (a) inform the public; (b) ask individuals for comments on plans already

developed; (c) engage residents to jointly develop ideas or recommendations that shape a project, and; (d) create ongoing mechanisms to help guide an undertaking over the long haul.

- Then, choose the one or more approaches that will best meet your needs.

To these ends, San Diego County has formed a Reentry Roundtable of more than 300 organizational and individual members, including law enforcement agencies, community and faith-based organizations, concerned citizens and parolees. This roundtable has been instrumental in the development of the San Diego Reentry Program and provides an ongoing forum for dialogue about reentry issues.

In San Francisco, the Safe Communities Reentry Council (SCRS) is steering former prisoners toward jobs, housing and education and away from crime. According to Jessica Flintoft, SCRS Reentry policy director: “Bringing formerly incarcerated people, public defenders and prosecutors, communities disproportionately impacted by recidivism, criminal justice officials, as well as county health, workforce, and social services together to one table may be difficult (but it) is the only way to develop sustainable solutions...”

Check out general public engagement resources at the Institute for Local Government (ILG) Web site ([www.ca-ilg.org/engagement](http://www.ca-ilg.org/engagement)) or contact me at [tamsler@ca-ilg.org](mailto:tamsler@ca-ilg.org). In the coming months, ILG plans to track and document effective collaborative and public engagement strategies in the corrections and reentry areas.

## **Funding Resource for Justice Programs**

A useful resource for fundraising — the (U.S.) Office of Justice Programs (OJP) has launched a new searchable online site where you can find thematically organized funding opportunities and new initiatives to help reduce crime, improve the justice system, and serve victims. See [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ProgramPlan/toc.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ProgramPlan/toc.htm).

## **New ILG Census and Immigrant Engagement Resources**

ILG has created a Census 2010 “complete count” Web site page ([www.ca-ilg.org/census](http://www.ca-ilg.org/census)) that includes information and resources about local and statewide efforts to ensure a complete count of all Californians.

The Institute’s Public Engagement and Collaborative Governance program has launched an Immigrant Engagement Listserv to facilitate the sharing of information and resources among local officials interested in the successful participation of immigrant residents in the civic and political life of their communities. To subscribe, visit:

<http://lists.cacities.org/mailman/listinfo/immigrantengagement>.

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